

12-395

Acquisition and Development of the Ford Plant, 1941.

On 26 June 1941, in a move that appeared to be the culmination of a year of rapid expansion of Quartermaster activities in the Pacific Northwest, the War Department acquired the Ford Plant at 4735 East Marginal Way as a site for the Seattle Quartermaster Depot.¹³ Constructed in 1931 at a cost of about \$3,000,000 as an

¹³ See Interim Report VI, "The Seattle Quartermaster Depot: Expansion and Reorganization, 1940-41", by Vernon Carstensen. The actual transfer of deed and title took place on 5 September 1941.

assembly plant for the Ford Motor Company, the Ford Plant comprised one two-story concrete and steel warehouse covering five acres of ground, one small oil and tank house and approximately thirty-three acres of land on the banks of the Duwamish Waterway.¹⁴ The War

¹⁴ See Appendix A, pp. 96 and 98 for photographs of the Ford Plant; p. 91 for an aerial view of the Depot; and p. 92 for a map indicating the location of the Depot in relation to other Seattle landmarks.

Department purchased the buildings and property for \$1,475,000.¹⁵

¹⁵ The actual breakdown in cost for the Ford property is as follows: \$1,093,000 for the building, \$350,000 for the 33 acres of land, \$9,000 for the oil storage building and \$23,000 for the water tower. Computed from Real Property Records in the Depot Engineer's files.

By this purchase, the Seattle Quartermaster Depot acquired 410,000 gross square feet of storage space in the building later known as



Warehouse #1,¹⁶ facilities for the storage of 215,500 gallons of

¹⁶ On the first floor, for example, 200,000 sq. ft.; on the second floor, 130,000 sq. ft.. The length of the building is 750 feet, the width 320 ft.; the wing is 50' x 100'. There are two hydraulic elevators of 10,000 pounds capacity. The area of the oil storage building is 7,360 sq. ft..

gas or oil, a steel tank with storage capacity of 160,000 gallons of water, a 500 foot dock on the Duwamish Waterway and limited acreage for expansion. The property consisted of fill ground, composed almost entirely of sand and a small amount of gravel, carted from the Denny Hill and Beacon Hill regrade projects and dumped into the Duwamish River.¹⁷ Although by agreement with the Ford Company,

¹⁷ See The Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 13 November 1941, "Vast Storage Building Takes Shape".

the Depot acquired the right of immediate occupancy as soon as the transfer of title was completed, the Company retained the use of 30,000 square feet of floor space for a period of some months. In September 1941, Lt. Colonel Thrasher and W. G. Patterson, Manager of the Ford Company in Seattle, worked out details for the joint occupancy of Warehouse #1. It was April 1942 before the last of the Ford personnel had evacuated the building.

The determining factors in the acquisition of the Ford Plant appear to have been its metropolitan location in the industrial section of Seattle where products required by the Depot were manufactured, the availability of deep-sea transport essential to the supply of Alaska, and the fact that the Depot reservation was

served by the joint trackage of four transcontinental railroads, the Great Northern, the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific, the Northern Pacific and the Union Pacific, the last mentioned being responsible for the switching service.¹⁸

¹⁸ See a description of the Seattle General Depot: Grounds, Buildings, etc., dated 1 March 1942; also a report on the Seattle Quartermaster Depot by the Depot Engineer, Capt. (now Major) H. H. Gough to HQ., WSC, Real Estate, Repairs and Utilities Division, 14 December 1942.

No sooner was the option on the Ford property signed than plans were under way for construction of additional warehouse space at that location. On 11 August 1941 a \$1,531,692.22 contract was awarded the Austin Company, Seattle, for the construction of Warehouse "A", now known as Warehouse #2.¹⁹ Work on the project was

¹⁹ Contract No. W 6408-QM-16.

actually begun on 18 September 1941. The new building, which was to be the largest single-story warehouse west of the Mississippi River, with a storage area of 347,424 square feet, was a permanent, factory-type warehouse of concrete and wood construction.²⁰ It was

²⁰ For a photograph of Whse. #2, See Appendix A, p. 99; also p. 99 for Chart I, Plant Layout, SMASD, July 1945, for its location in relation to Whse. #1. The building is 1,125 ft. long and 303 ft. wide. There are 43 steel shipping doors on the West for truck shipments and 43 steel shipping doors on the East for rail and truck shipments. A railroad spur has been added on the West side to supplement one on the East side.

built at a cost of \$1,540,000. Because the Ford property consisted of sand-filled tide flats, Warehouse #2 had to be supported first on

wood and then on concrete piles. On account of Seattle climatic conditions — this warehouse was constructed during the rainy season — the Contracting Quartermaster soon found that the cement piles, 7,140 of which were required for the foundations, were not "curing" properly and that fifty per cent of them were breaking while being driven. In order to speed the program of national defense, the engineer in charge of the project devised a process whereby the cement piles were subjected to steam baths, which facilitated dehydration.²¹ The same process was used for curing the

²¹ See The Seattle Post Intelligencer, 13 November 1941, "Vast Storage Building Takes Shape". E. Donald Miller was the engineer in charge of construction, under Capt. H. L. Morias, Constructing Quartermaster. Miller, who had heard of the use of refrigeration to harden the piles at Grand Coulee Dam, where the weather was too hot, figured that heat could be used successfully in Seattle where the weather was too cold and damp. The piles were subjected to 14 hours of steam at 100° followed by 24 hours at 70°. At the end it was found that each pile would stand 60 tons of live pressure.

slab concrete, heat being furnished at night from lateral steam pipes laid beneath the floor of the warehouse.

Warehouse #2 was only forty-five per cent completed on 12 November 1941. Immediately following Pearl Harbor arrangements were made to expedite construction by running three shifts seven days per week. For an additional cost of a little over \$58,000 the building program was speeded up in order to complete the warehouse by 24 January 1942 instead of by the first of March as originally planned.²² Warehouse #2 was actually turned over to the Depot

²² See Tel. Con., Capt. Bell, Zone Constructing Quartermaster,

San Francisco, and Lt. Col. C. G. Thrasher, SGS, 12 December 1941.

on the twenty-ninth of January 1942 and occupied on the first day of February. The fencing of the Depot reservation with an eight-foot cyclone fence, topped by barbed wire, and the necessary grading and filling of the Northwest Area were undertaken in January 1942 at a cost of \$13,500.00.²³ The paving and railroad work —

²³ Austin Company to Constructing QM, SCD, 16 January 1942.

the balance of the project — was not completed until 9 February 1942.²⁴

²⁴ 1st Ind. Lt. Col. M. B. Birdseye to QMC, 16 May 1942.

Plans for the construction of a Medical Warehouse at the Seattle Depot were discussed as early as April 1941.²⁵ After the

²⁵ See Interim Report No. I, Seattle Medical Section, "Activation and Early History of the Medical Section, Seattle Army Service Forces Depot, 1 May 1941 to 1 July 1942", by J. Alice McKnight, p. 14. Plans for a warehouse of approximately 100,000 sq. ft. were approved by the Surgeon General's Office, 30 April 1941.

option for the Ford Plant had been signed the Surgeon General's office asked and obtained an allocation of 50,000 square feet on the second floor of Warehouse #1, pending the construction of the Medical Warehouse on land adjacent to the new Depot site. During the months that followed Medical plans fluctuated greatly. At one time in July, consideration was given to the acquisition of the entire second floor of the Ford Warehouse for Medical storage in lieu of new construction.²⁶ One month later, when the space re-

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

uirements for the Medical Section were raised to 300,000 square feet, the Adjutant General was asked to purchase vacant land across from the Ford property for the construction of a Medical warehouse.

When the Medical Supply Section was finally activated on 28 August 1941, Major (now Colonel) H. E. Tomlinson, the new Medical Supply Officer, established temporary headquarters at the Ford Plant. He advocated the construction during the next eight or ten months of a reinforced concrete Medical Warehouse, approximately 300,000 square feet in area, across from the Ford Plant.²⁷ Medical

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

Department funds in excess of \$1,000,000 were made available for the project. Meanwhile Major Tomlinson secured an allocation of 600 square feet of space for the storage of inflammables at the Ford Oil House. It was agreed that as soon as Warehouse "A" was completed the entire second floor of the Ford building would be turned over to the Medical Section pending the construction of Medical storage space.²⁸ Just prior to Pearl Harbor, however, Major

²⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

Tomlinson was notified by the Surgeon General's Office that obstacles had arisen in connection with the acquisition of land adjacent to the Ford site and that construction of the Medical Warehouse would

therefore be delayed.²⁹ As the tension increased between Japan and

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7. The letter from the SGD was dated 8 December 1941.

the United States in the fall of 1941, there was much discussion about expediting the Medical Warehouse, but no further action had been taken when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.

In November 1941, shortly after the separation of the Depot from the Seattle Port of Embarkation, Lt. Colonel Thrasher submitted plans for the further development of the Ford Plant Area, including an administration building (75,000 square feet), with a cafeteria capable of serving two hundred fifty people at one sitting; a utility shop and storage building; a garage and repair shop with room for one hundred vehicles, and a parking area equipped with covered stalls to accommodate four hundred cars and trucks.³⁰ In defense of the

³⁰ Thrasher to Constructing Quartermaster, 12 November 1941, and 1st Lt. A. K. Reed, Constructing QM, to CO, SGD, 3 December 1941, with estimates on the cost of the above construction as follows:

Office Bldg. (75,000 sq. ft.)	\$211,504.00
Utility Shop & Storage Bldg.	35,063.00
Garage & Repair Shop	17,660.00
Covered Stalls for Cars & Trucks	7,353.00
Total	\$271,610.00

expansion program he cited in particular the insufficient office space available at the Ford Plant, where the construction of temporary offices displaced valuable storage space.³¹ In spite of

³¹ Thrasher to QMC, 11 December 1941.

the emergency, final approval of the program by the Office of the

Since the property required for construction of the new Quartermaster and Medical Warehouses was not secured until 8 June 1942, the additional storage space they were designed to provide was not available until October. As far as the Seattle Depot was concerned, it was fortunate that this extensive construction program was at least authorized in the spring of 1942. Early in July it became the policy of the War Department "to authorize no more construction at any place for any purpose."⁴⁰

⁴⁰Cel. Robinson E. Buff, Depot Service, SGD, to CG, SGD, 3 July 1942.

Additional construction on the Ford site, north of the two permanent warehouses, got under way in the spring of 1942. Until the Administration Building, plans for which included a well-equipped cafeteria for two hundred fifty persons, was completed in October 1942, the Depot made use of a temporary shack on the Ford premises for cafeteria purposes.⁴¹ Used as a field office by the Austin

⁴¹ See Appendix A, p. 98, Utilities Plan, SGD, 3 March 1942; also Birdseye to CG, MSG, 19 October 1942.

Construction Company during the building of Warehouse #2, this shack was purchased for \$1620. The temporary cafeteria, opened on the fourteenth of February, made hot lunches possible for Depot employees, who, because of the lack of restaurant facilities in the industrial area adjacent to the Ford Plant, had been forced to bring their lunches with them or buy "Mom's Boxed Lunches" at the Depot. This structure was demolished in October to make possible

the completion of the new Administration Building.

The Post Utilities Office Building, with a gross area of 3,040 square feet, was the only part of the new construction program to be completed in the spring of 1942.⁴² Built at a cost of \$15,000,

⁴² See Ltr. Major H. H. Cough, Post Engineer, to Eq. MSC, 14 December 1942, reporting on land acquired and construction undertaken at the Depot. For a photograph, see Appendix A, p. 99.

it was ready for occupancy by the eighth of May. The Utility Shop and Warehouse (10,000 square feet), built at a cost of \$35,963 and the Motor Repair Shop (4,500 square feet), costing \$12,000, were not completed until 12 October 1942.⁴³

⁴³ Photographs of these structures will be found in Appendix A, p. 101.

Work on the new two-story Administration Building, designed by the Division Engineer, and intended to house most of Quartermaster and Medical Administration offices, as well as the cafeteria, did not begin until 10 July 1942. The contract for the L-shaped frame building, which cost \$315,000 and provided 78,000 square feet of space, was awarded to the General Construction Company.⁴⁴ The

⁴⁴ For photographs, see Appendix A, pp. 103 to 101. As in the case of Warehouse #2, the Administration Building was constructed on piles on filled-in land. Owing to the fact that the building has settled, additional reinforcement of pillars has since been necessary.

building was of modern design, with an air-conditioning system and sound insulation. It was ready for partial occupancy by the twelfth

of October, the Cafeteria was opened on the fourteenth and the Quartermaster Section moved in between the eighteenth and the twenty-second. In other words, it was practically a year after the plans for the construction program were outlined by Colonel Thrasher before the space was available for use.

To provide for the expansion of the Seattle Depot, the War Department initiated proceedings in the fall of 1941 for the acquisition of 31 acres of land across from the Ford site.⁴⁵ The nec-

⁴⁵This property was bounded on the south by West Hudson Street, on the north by West Oregon Street, on the east by Colorado Avenue and on the west by East Marginal Way. The thoroughfare of West Alaska Street within the condemned area was deeded to the Government by the City of Seattle. See Appendix A, p. 90.

cessity for purchase under condemnation proceedings, however, involved a delay of several months. Although the construction of the Medical Warehouse (Warehouse #3, 1,560 feet by 180 feet) and two Quartermaster Warehouses (Warehouse #4, 960 feet by 180 feet; Warehouse #5, 840 feet by 180 feet) was authorized, with description and estimates of the work prepared by 30 March 1942, in the expectation that beneficial occupancy of all three buildings would be accomplished in July, it was not until the eighth of June that the Government obtained possession of the property and work could actually begin.⁴⁶

⁴⁶See Directive Consecutive No. P-174, 30 March 1942, with Engineering Information and Instructions for Expansion to Seattle General Depot, Appendix B, pp. 107 to 112. This provided for beneficial occupancy of Ware. #4, 4 July 1942, of Ware. #5, 18 July 1942; of Ware. #3, 31 July 1942, with completion of the entire program by 28 August 1942.

Special requirements for the Medical Warehouse, including provision for a combined office, receiving and shipping room, additional heating facilities, roof insulation, a concrete vault, packing rooms, etc., were prepared in April.⁴⁷ By the end of May, all plans were

⁴⁷ See Directive Consecutive No. P-202, 4 April 1942, Special Requirements at Seattle General Depot, Appendix B, p. 113. These arrangements were modified on 22 April to include the vault, packing rooms, maintenance crib, carpenter shop, etc. See Interim Report I, Medical Section, pp. 103-4.

completed and construction awaited outright possession of the property by the Government.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ See 2nd Ind. Major H. H. Cough, Post Utilities Officer, to Division Engineer, Salt Lake City, 31 May 1942, Appendix B, p. 116.

Although the acquisition of Block #6, a tract of 5.3 acres directly across from Warehouse #1, was seriously considered in the spring of 1941, first in May for a Military Police Camp, and again in June as a site for the Inflammable Warehouse and for open storage purposes, both projects were vetoed in Washington. The Depot was instructed to locate the Inflammable Warehouse on land already acquired by the Government.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ For further details, see the section on Block #6, pp. 30 to 40. On the Inflammable Warehouses, see below, p. 25.

The contract for the construction of Warehouses #3, #4, and #5 was awarded to Henrik Valle of Great Falls, Montana, under the supervision of the Area Engineer. Construction was under way

by the middle of June and the buildings were slated for completion by the end of September. The total cost of construction was estimated at \$2,419,000, of which \$1,123,000 was allocated for the big Medical Warehouse, \$691,000 for Warehouse #4 and \$585,000 for Warehouse #5. Because of the scarcity of materials no protective sprinkling systems could be installed in the new warehouses at this time. Instead, brick firewalls extending from floor to roof, which divided the warehouses into sections, constituted an unusual feature of this construction program.⁵⁰ Because of labor shortages, the

⁵⁰ For the construction of automatic sprinkler systems in Warehouses #3, #4, and #5 in the spring of 1944, see below, p. 81.

warehouses were not completed until the middle of November. The Medical Section, however, was able to occupy the two north bays of Warehouse #3 (14,400 square feet) on the third of October. To meet the critical storage situation, occupancy of the Quartermaster Warehouses was authorized some two weeks later on 19 October 1942. Actual transfer of the new construction was not effected until December.

The balance of the big 1942 expansion project, the construction of a permanent Inflammable Storage Building (50 feet by 240 feet) at a cost of \$41,560, was begun 18 August 1942 and completed by the twenty-sixth of December. The building, which was located to the north of Warehouse #5, was intended for the joint use of the Medical and Quartermaster Sections, with an allocation of 3,000 square feet of space for the former and 6,000 square feet

for the latter. Early in 1943, in order to release 7,360 square feet of storage space at the Oil House to the Depot Quartermaster, provision was made to divide the space at the Inflammable Warehouse evenly between the Medical and Quartermaster Sections.⁵¹

⁵¹ See Birdseye to QMG, 11 February 1943; and the reply, 27 February 1943.

The 1942 construction program not only eased the critical shortage of office and storage space which prevailed at the beginning of the year, but it permitted a more effective use of that space. The completion of the Administration Building released much valuable storage space in Warehouse #1. The construction of Warehouse #3 made possible a consolidation of the bulk of Medical supplies within the confines of one building. As late as 13 October 1942, for example, Medical supplies were stored in five different buildings: on both the first and second floors of Warehouse #1 (132,000 square feet); at the Ford Oil House (7,360 square feet); the Chester Building (24,000 square feet); Ames Terminal (16,000 square feet) and in the two north bays of Warehouse #3.⁵² As far

⁵² Lt. Col. Tomlinson, MSE, to CG, SQUID, 13 October 1942; and 1st Ind. Birdseye to QMG, 22 October 1942.

as possible, each type of supplies was henceforth located in a separate building. In Warehouse #1, Clothing and Equipage and General Supplies were stored in three distinct blocks. Warehouse #3, after the removal of Clothing and Equipage stored there previously, was devoted to subsistence as originally intended, inclu-